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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6439
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001025

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EEB/TPP/MTA - VOLTMER
DEPT FOR EEB/TPP/ABT - CLEMENTS AND BOBO
DEPT FOR EEB/TPP - LURIE
DEPT PASS USDA/GAS/OCRA FOR EIDBAND
DEPT PASS USDA/FAS FOR CJACKSON AND HOUSE
DEPT PASS USTR FOR MMOWREY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2023

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SUBJECT: EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURAL
BIOTECHNOLOGY IN TURKEY

REF: A. STATE 52628
[1](#)B. STATE 53346
[1](#)C. ANKARA 976

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This report was coordinated with FAS Ankara.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: Agricultural Biotechnology is a very sensitive subject in Turkey about which there currently is little public debate. Turkey is taking its lead on biotech policy from Europe, in part due to its desire to join the European Union. Both the Turkish public and GOT officials have been misinformed about alleged dangers from biotech. A draft Biosafety Law that would virtually criminalize transgenic crop imports and disrupt U.S. exports has thus far been blocked by domestic stakeholders. Turkey is a major importer of biotech products from the United States, and U.S. exporters benefit from the current "don't ask, don't tell" import system. In this situation, we believe trying to pressure the government publicly to change its policies could produce a public backlash against biotechnology. We continue to work with domestic farmers and other stakeholders to educate the GOT and the public about the benefits of agricultural biotechnology. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Per Ref C, we delivered the points in Ref B to the Turkish Foreign Trade Undersecretariat (FTU). Agricultural biotechnology is a very sensitive topic in Turkey, and we believe that a low-key approach that relies heavily on domestic stakeholders to apply pressure to the GOT for change is the least counterproductive course of action on this topic. The following details our strategy in Turkey for promoting biotechnology.

[1](#)4. (C) Turkey imports over \$1 billion annually in biotech corn, cotton, soybeans and other products from the United States. Its current import policy is based on a "don't ask, don't tell" system. Despite these imports, the Turkish public and officials, including most scientists and policy makers, are seriously misinformed about biotechnology. The Agriculture Minister has stated publicly that the EU does not allow the production of any transgenic crops (which it does), and that he believes multinational corporations are using the current high food prices to force acceptance of biotechnology. The head of the Agricultural Engineers Association is also vocally anti-biotechnology. There are anti-GMO campaigns in Turkey trying to frighten the public about the alleged risks of transgenic crops. There is a danger of public backlash against biotech if transgenic

products are imported without oversight or approval.

15. (C) Turkey is a signatory to the Biosafety Protocol but it has no legislation in force. A draft Biosafety Law has been circulating for several years. As currently written, it would virtually criminalize transgenic crop imports and severely disrupt U.S. exports. So far, it has been blocked by feed industry stakeholders and their supporters in Parliament.

16. (C) Dr. Vehbi Eser, the leader of Turkey delegation to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), is the author of the draft Biosafety law, which would create a National Biosafety Institute under his authority. His draft legislation imposes mandatory prison terms for possession of an unapproved genetic event, yet contains no details on how products can become approved. So far, biotech-friendly members of Parliament have been able to block this legislation, but there is pressure to pass some sort of legislation because Turkey is a CBD signatory.

17. (C) Comment: The Ministry of Agriculture is suspicious of information or proposals that come from bio-technology producing countries or companies. Therefore, we have found domestic stakeholders to be much more effective at affecting GOT policies than direct USG demarches or efforts at persuasion. We are working with a handful of importers and end-users who rely on biotech products, a few highly educated farmers who are eager to improve their available technology, and some biotech-friendly academics to educate the government and public about the benefits of biotechnology. Last year, we organized a trip for Turkish farmers to see transgenic crops being grown in the EU, biotech conferences in Adana and

Istanbul, and a pro-biotech speaker at the Istanbul Forum. We are planning to send Turkish farmers and media representatives to a course on biotechnology in the United States in the fall.

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